

## **two fingers and a tight line**

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# two fingers and a tight line

by [ohtempora](#)

## Summary

Samira knows underneath it all he's saying *either you trust me or you don't*. They've sewed people up and stabilized them and put them back together and Samira's hands stayed steady the whole time.

## Notes

many thanks to bropunzeling for taking a look at this, as always.  
title from camp's by and by.

cw for discussion of vomiting and pittfest aftermath.

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Samira switches to night shifts the week after PittFest.

Their schedules are set in advance by the program director. She didn't ask for anything. But after a few days she realizes how much she needed the change, something to jar her out of the tension spreading through the floor—Robby, withdrawn somewhere deep inside himself; Collins, guilty she wasn't there; Dana out on two weeks of PTO that might go longer. And no one knows where the hell Langdon is. If Robby knows, he's not talking.

She was in a haze too. She closes her eyes and she can hear it, the way the rhythm in the ED changed as they brought in patient after patient, the silence, the screams. And she was *good* at it. That's what gets her. She was good at it.

"Slo-Mo," Shen says when she walks in on her first shift, but it's an exclamation, not an insult, so Samira lets it slide when he nudges her with his elbow and grins. "You ready to stay up late with us?"

After her drink in the park, she'd called for a rideshare home, didn't trust herself to drive even the ten minutes between the hospital and her apartment. Her roommates were watching coverage of the shooting on the news and Samira walked right past them, didn't hear them call out to her in concern, left her clothes in a heap on her bedroom floor and fell asleep. She woke up at 2 AM after nightmares full of flashing lights and sirens, didn't know where she was, then had to run into the shower to get the scent of the hospital off her and the traces of dried blood. She'd thrown up water and then sick stinging bile, splashing across the tile floor until she felt purged, clean. The hospital gave them all the day off after, sent emails about resources available through the employee assistance program; Samira deleted them and bought last-minute tickets to a Pirates game, forced herself to listen only to the white noise of the crowd and let herself be chilled by crisp fall air, staring at the faraway outlines of the players on the field. She felt better the next day in the ED, but only a little.

And now it's 7 PM and the ground is shifting under her feet. "Of course," Samira says. Shen's easy to get along with. Easy to smile at. He's got a pen stuck behind his ear and is looking at her expectantly, friendly. "I'm good."

Night shifts always start off busy, the stream of patients holding steady until midnight or so. She's rotated through them before but it always takes a while to remember the patterns. Still, Samira kind of

likes how when she steps outside for fresh air it's dark out, the sky navy blue, streetlights bleeding yellow and orange on the pavement. They have a cardiac arrest 6 minutes away. She takes deep breaths in the ambulance bay, in and out, until she hears sirens in the distance and goes back inside.

The patient—early 60s, has a mustache that reminds her of her stepdad, pale and sweating on the gurney—makes it upstairs to cardiology alive, and Abbot claps her on the shoulder when they're done. "Nice work," he says. "You got a sec?"

She follows him to Central, wondering if he, too, is going to ask if she's okay. Everyone did that first day back after the shooting. How are you doing? You okay? Everything good? Did you get any sleep?

She hadn't slept, but none of them had.

"Hey," Abbot says. "What do you think about doing a case report on the pigtail catheter? I talked to medicine after he was admitted and it sounds like the patient's gonna give consent."

"I—what?"

"Case report," Abbot repeats. "Come on, I know you're familiar with the process. Robby told me about the research you're working on about disparate treatment, probably months ago at this point, and I looked up your med school work. You're a good writer. You in?"

He raises his eyebrows at her, and she doesn't know why he's presenting research as a challenge, but it's working. "Yes, of course," Samira tells him.

Abbot's hand jerks, like he wants to go for a handshake or a high five and doesn't know which. Samira watches as he flexes his fingers, then makes a fist. "Alright," he says. "Great. We'll talk."

"Alright," Samira repeats, and goes to check in on a patient with stomach pains.

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She has two whole days off, uses them to go for a long run and call her mom—her stepsister grabs the phone out of her mom's hand and spends ten minutes talking extensively about her latest high school volleyball drama, which helps more than Samira wants to admit—and goes for another run when the first one doesn't do enough to make her

mind go blank. On the second day, she opens a couple of the emails Abbot sent her about the case report. There are links to precedent he thought she might find interesting, a couple samples for her to follow, and it's all laid out very matter-of-fact, his dry, amused tone bleeding through the words on the page. He signs the email "*Thanks, Jack*".

It will actually help, Samira realizes, to look at this clinically. She read about the IO drill hole in a medical journal and was able to put it into practice; now someone can hopefully do the same for this and stabilize a patient, maybe save a life. She clicks through a couple of the links and starts reading. Half an hour later she's settled in and taking notes and realizes she might need to order dinner if she wants to be productive tonight.

One of her roommates is in the living room, curled up with her laptop, three separate highlighters, and a giant casebook. "You good?" Rachel asks.

"Yeah, just working on some research—do you want to get Sichuan Gourmet?"

Rachel scratches her nose, then makes a face when she realizes she's holding an uncapped highlighter. "That sounds great. I think Jihyun is still in the lab but she likes their shrimp hot pot thing if you want to order?"

Samira hands Rachel her phone so she can start the order. "Studying?" she asks, nodding at the pile of books.

"I'm trying to." Rachel sighs. "You said you're working?"

"I'm writing up a patient case report. Might as well use the time off to be productive, right?"

"Mmm." Rachel caps the highlighter and sits up. "If you need anything—"

Samira makes herself smile at her. "All good," she says. "Just let me know when the food is here? I was sort of on a roll, my attending sent me a few helpful links, so."

"Yep, I'll grab you," Rachel says. Something in her answering smile is a little sad. Samira isn't sure why. "Good luck on the report, yeah?"

"Thanks," Samira says, and heads back to her laptop. She joins Rachel and Jihyun in the living room for dinner, though they're all working,

then goes to bed early. She should catch up on sleep while she can.

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Another week of nights, the weather getting wintry, the sky a deep blue-black when she leaves for work. Ellis delivers a baby one night, L&D walking in right as the kid is crowning. They get car accidents and heart attacks and GSWs, but nothing like PittFest. Samira is pretty sure Abbot, however accidentally, scares one med student right back into the arms of internal medicine when he mentions her IO drill maneuver. “That reminds me, wanna chat about the case report?” Abbot asks, once the med student is safely watching another resident run through a concussion test. “Hey, I’ll buy you coffee.”

Samira looks at him, suspicious. “You mean we’re getting free coffee from the lounge?” she asks. “Or actual coffee?”

“You drive a hard bargain,” Abbot says. “Actual coffee.”

The cafeteria stays open until midnight and the coffee available for purchase is at least 15% better than the sludge produced by the staff lounge keurig. “Alright,” Samira concedes.

The thing is: she does want to talk about the case report. Above all else, Samira wants to be a good doctor, and to be a good doctor, she has to learn.

“Great,” Abbot says. “Let’s go now before we get slammed again.”

Shen, looking up at the big board, says, “man, it’s been *chill*—“ and gets elbowed, hard, by Ellis.

“Now we gotta make a run for it,” Abbot says, shaking his head. “After you, Dr. Mohan.”

Samira heads to the elevator, feels Abbot’s level gaze on her every step of the way until they’re standing side by side. She pushes the button for the cafeteria and watches numbers tick up until the door dings and opens.

Abbot isn’t loud, but he isn’t quiet, and she’s surprised he isn’t talking to her. But he seems content to walk peaceably beside her to the caf, exchanging hellos with a couple other doctors he seems to know until they’re grabbing their coffee. He pays, like he promised.

The cafeteria has weird lighting, like it’s trying to look welcoming,

and at this hour is mostly empty. They manage to grab a table far away from a couple of exhausted-looking residents Samira thinks are in peds, shielded by a leafy plant from view. Abbot takes a long sip of his drink. His eyes don't leave her face and Samira wonders what he's seeing—the purple smudges under her eyes, the way her hair is already frizzing out from her buns, the healed-over sore spot on her lip. She has a blind zit on her jaw she can feel, throbbing under her skin.

"It's okay if it fucked you up," Abbot says.

Samira gulps her coffee, winces, rips open another sugar packet. "What," she says. "Writing the case report? As discussed, I've done plenty of research before, Dr. Abbot." He's still looking at her. His eyebrow raises, minute; she sighs. "I'm fine," she says.

"I'm not saying you're fine or not fine," he says. "I'm not, but I wasn't before. That's fine, that's my personal shit and I'm dealing with it. All I'm saying is it happens."

Like Robby, Samira thinks, except she's not going to say it aloud. Bad enough she heard from one of the travel nurses who heard from one of the nurses he was breaking down on the floor in peds.

"It's good to be on nights for a bit," she says. "Nice to have a change of pace."

"Well, I'm always happy to have you," Abbot says. "I'm just sayin', that's all."

Samira drinks some more of her coffee, idly stirs it while she looks back at him. His hair is longer than normal and he's unshaven; she knows he's been working a lot just like Robby is, though with Abbot she thinks it's standard. Mel had a 24-hour a couple days ago and told her she was worried about Robby, that she didn't know him all too well but he seemed like he was fraying apart at the seams. Samira understands what it's like, grasping at threads.

"I didn't think I could do it," Samira says abruptly. She scrapes her teeth against her lower lip. They're chapped with the arrival of colder air, and chewing at them when she's nervous is a cultivated vice. She's going to make herself bleed. "The red zone—I didn't know. I mean, like that, you know? And Robby just put me there—"

"You fucking killed it." His gaze is steady. "Do you think I'd say that to just anybody?"

“No,” Samira says. She feels a tooth catch on a sore spot, forces herself to stop. “I don’t.”

“So either you believe me or you don’t,” he says, and she knows underneath it all he’s saying either you trust me or you don’t. They’ve sewed people up and stabilized them and put them back together and Samira’s hands stayed steady the whole time.

“Is that a good thing?” she asks, brings her hand up to form quotation marks. “Killing it?”

“Yeah, it is,” Abbot says. “You did what was asked of you—more than. Don’t be upset you rose to the occasion. Be glad there are people in the world who can do it, and that you’re one of ‘em, and if you need to talk to someone, then do that.” He reaches out and wraps his hand around her wrist, squeezes, then freezes. “Sorry,” he says.

“No, it’s okay.” Samira brushes his hand with her fingertips. Her skin tingles where he touched it. “Thanks.”

“There’s only room for one of us on the roof,” Abbot says. Samira frowns at him, confused, and his expression clears. “Never mind. Hey, I know you got my email—I actually did want to talk, this wasn’t just an excuse for me to make a speech at you.”

“Sure,” Samira says, then covers her hand with her mouth, but it’s fine, Abbot is snorting and trying to cover up a laugh, his foot brushing against hers under the table. After a second he moves it away, and she begins to fill him in on her progress.

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She rotates through days again, notes how each shift still feels fragile and tentative. Dana is back, nose healed but expression dour; she’s pressing charges against the patient and has meetings scheduled with hospital lawyers. Robby is worse than he was before. They get the news Langdon is on leave and Mel, standing next to Samira, full-body flinches.

“That’s all I can tell you for right now,” Robby says. “We’ll have to shift around some staffing. You’ll get updates on that as needed and the program director and myself appreciate your flexibility.” He heads off, presumably to check on a patient, mouth tight. Samira looks over at Mel. She looks drawn, eyes downcast behind her glasses.

“You okay?” she asks.



“Um, yeah.” Samira looks more closely. Mel has her hands wrapped around her stethoscope, knuckles white. “Just been kind of a weird few weeks. How were nights? I haven’t worked any of them here yet.”

“Good. Different.” Better than this. Samira glances up at the board, trying to see if there’s anything the two of them could take together. Suspected appendicitis and a broken nose—well, they can set the break. “South 9, let’s see what happened.”

Mel follows her down the hall and doesn’t ask how Samira is overall, maybe because she doesn’t want the question turned around on her, but Samira is still grateful. They set the broken nose (college kid playing pickup basketball, got hit in the face; his friend is sitting guiltily in the chair next to him, though he perks up when Mel assures them it will heal fine) and send the girl with appendicitis upstairs into the tender arms of surgery. When he comes to grab Mel to observe a thrombectomy, Robby doesn’t say anything about her speed or lack thereof, though he says, “Dr. Abbot mentioned you’re working on a case report about the pigtail catheter from PittFest.”

“Um, yes.” Samira looks up at him. She guesses it’s his job to keep an eye on this sort of thing. “It was his idea.”

“It’s a good idea,” Robby says. He scrubs a hand through his beard, considering. “He spoke pretty highly of you after. Do me a favor, send it my way when you’re done with the draft.”

Samira nods, waves at Mel, and goes to look at the burst ovarian cyst waiting in the north hallway.

After a few days it stops feeling like she’s walking a tightrope—it does help a ton that Dana is back—and she gets dinner with Mel and her sister one night, tells Mel about her step siblings when asked about her family. “They’re both teenagers,” Samira says, shrugging. “17 and 19. Our parents got married when I was in college. I can’t imagine it’s anything like having a twin, but it’s really nice now.” She shows Mel a picture of her and her stepsister at her med school graduation. Liv is wearing her hat and tassel and grinning like a loon, both her arms thrown around Samira’s shoulders.

Becca demands that Mel show Samira the photos of them at Mel’s graduation after that, and Samira looks through the photos of the two of them decked out in Michigan maize and blue, smiling before handing the phone back. When she gets home she does genuinely feel lighter, somehow—it was a nice evening. Her roommates are both

studying in the living room and Samira sits with them and works on her case report, earbuds in, until it's time to go to bed.

Ellis calls in sick that weekend with norovirus; she'll be fine in the next day or two but there's no way she can work her shift and she's incredibly contagious. Samira offers to stay and cover without thinking twice. Ellis has covered for her in the past and today wasn't too bad, though they've got plenty of people coming through with the exact same strain of virus Ellis picked up. I got you next time, she sends Samira, who hearts the message and goes to get more coffee in advance of working all night.

"We could have found someone else," Abbot says when he walks in and sees her leaning on the counter at Central.

"You're here." Samira wraps her hands around her stethoscope, doesn't care if she's being impertinent. At this point she knows he won't care either. Staffing is still out of whack with Langdon out, another resident on parental leave and one of the attendings on vacation. Whoever covered would likely be working a double anyway, even if it wasn't her. Abbot's as overworked as the rest of them.

"And you're off tomorrow and are going to rest."

She looks away first. "Yes," she says.

"—Alright," Abbot says. "Fine. Catch me up on the psych boarder from earlier in the week. Robby said he's still waiting for a bed."

Samira winces. "Yes, and he's in soft restraints and sedated. I think Perlah was able to contact the family today, but they're in Dallas and hadn't talked to him in a few months."

"Shit," Abbot says. "Okay. I'll bug psych again. Go bother some med students for a while. I think that kid from Nebraska is here tonight. Let's see what he's got."

Samira nods and goes to find Whitaker, who actually seems better after his hellish first day at PTMC than the rest of them. Her skin prickles as she turns, a shiver across the back of her neck. She's fairly sure Abbot is watching her as she goes.

She makes it through the shift with coffee and a nap in the call room. Abbot sends her on around 1 AM, 20 whole minutes in which he promises she won't be bothered with one big hand wrapped around her bicep. "I'm alright, Shen has an extra Celsius in his locker," she

says, and Abbot squeezes her arm and rolls his eyes at her, tells her not to drink anything Shen's been stashing in his locker for the last four months and to just go lie the fuck down already. Samira touches the hand he's still got on her until he withdraws it, something flashing in his eyes she can't quite name, and goes to pass out until her pager goes off. It's a grandmother with a suspected stroke, though it seems like the EMTs were called in time, and they get neuro down to assess. He hands her a coffee when they're done, his fingers trailing across her palm during the transfer. Samira looks up at him, lips parted.

"Two sugars, right?" Abbot's voice is stuck deep in his chest he coughs, clearing his throat. "Sorry."

"For the staff lounge coffee, yes." Capable hands, Samira thinks wildly, takes a sip of too-hot coffee and scorches the top of her mouth. Her own hand is tingling. "I—it's alright, I don't mind. Thank you. I needed this."

"Anytime." This time the touch to her elbow is deliberate, and Abbot walks off jauntily, hands in his pockets and his back very straight.

One of the interns, Bennington, asks her where she got the coffee, tells her the staff lounge is out. "Dr. Abbot got it for me," Samira tells him.

He looks impressed. "Really?"

"Well, we're working on a case report together," Samira says, like that's enough to justify it, the coffee and the too-intimate touch, and tosses the now-empty cup in the trash.

When the shift ends, three paramedics have arrived soaking wet—it's pouring outside, and Samira doesn't envy the day shift the MVAs about to come rolling through the ambulance bay. She spent the last 90 minutes trying to keep a guy from coding and he was hanging on by a thread during sign out. Collins came in to relieve her as soon as practicable, but it's a delicate dance and Samira is worried about what she'll come back to in 36 hours.

Abbot is near the door, jacket over his scrub top, hands shoved in his pocket. Samira stops short when she sees him—surely he isn't waiting for her.

"Mohan," Abbot says, and oh, she guesses he is waiting. "I'll walk you to your car?"

"I actually walked here today," Samira says. Surely he isn't worried

she's going to try and stay. She adds, defensive, "It wasn't raining when I left this morning." Which is also why her umbrella is safely hanging from a hook in the foyer next to the lanyard with Jihyun's CMU ID and Rachel's favorite scarf.

"Okay," Abbot says, and kindly doesn't remark about how that was 24 hours ago and the weather can change over the course of a full day. "You want a ride?"

"Um, sure." Samira sort of surprises herself with the speed at which she accepts. She doesn't know if she would accept a ride from, say, Robby, but it feels different with him and she lives pretty close. She's let McKay drive her home a couple times. This could just be like that, accepting a favor from someone willing to give it. And she doesn't want to call a cab after a double, doesn't want to make small talk with the driver about her job or where she's going or why.

Abbot's car is messy, though she's not surprised when she sees his go bag parked in the backseat, nor is she surprised when she almost sits on a copy of the Lancet when she gets in. "Sorry," he says. "Wasn't expecting company."

"I appreciate it." She gives him her address, then sits back and closes her eyes. Abbot hums and turns on music, quiet enough that Samira can only make out a thrumming bassline, and before she knows it they're pulling up to her building.

"Thank you again," she says, pulling her hood over her head, preparing to make the mad dash in to avoid the rain splattering hard against the pavement.

Abbot says, "Anytime," arm extending towards her before he pulls it back, patting her shoulder, and Samira waves at him before she can think better of it, flushes at the look on his face. She doesn't know if he was going for a hug before he changed his mind, but now she's thinking about the musculature in his arms, and yeah, she needs to get out of his car.

"Have a good night," she says—even more idiotic, it's 7:45 in the morning and the sun is up, even if it's hidden behind thunderclouds—and gets out of the car before she can say something revealing. She runs into her building. When she turns to close the door behind her, Abbot is shooting her finger guns from behind the steering wheel. Samira bites back a smile and decidedly does not think about the freckles on his forearm she saw when he was reaching for the clutch.

She finishes the draft of the case report when she wakes up later that afternoon, luxuriating in working from a cafe instead of her living room or her bed. Abbot responds two minutes after she hits send on the email: *thought this was supposed to be your day off.*

Samira rolls her eyes at her computer screen and is trying to figure out exactly how pithy her response can be when another email comes through. *Really good work, though. A few questions/comments attached but that's all from me.*

*Thank you, I'll review,* Samira says, and opens the document. And he's telling the truth; it's a light markup, half the comments complimentary, even the ones asking her to elaborate. good observation, let's expand this. It settles in her chest, the warm glow of a job well done.

She likes working with him. Maybe it's because he takes her for who she is, pushes her without it being painful, brusque and encouraging all at once. You can do this, and she believes him, and he's right. She can. Robby was—is, mostly—a good teacher, but Samira's beginning to think she wants more from him than he can give right now, even though he was the one to put her in the red zone in the first place. In a fucked up way, she wants to thank him just as much as she wanted to curse him out for it, those first few nights after the MCI. But it's easier with Abbot. Without realizing it, they came to an understanding she can rely on.

Samira starts on the revisions. In a couple weeks she's back on nights. It would be nice to present Abbot with a fully-finished report by then. She thinks about the crinkles at the corners of his eyes when he smiles at her, his hand encircling her wrist, fingers wrapped all the way around. It would be easy to turn into him, nudge him with her hip. She clenches her thighs together, hits the space bar hard, accepts two of his suggestions in track changes. Probably better not to let this drag on.

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Samira follows Abbot into one of the empty rooms during a lull, her patient with acute onset vertigo sent for imaging and dealt with for now. The case report is ready to go, though it's sitting in Robby's email per his earlier request. Samira figures if he sits on it too long Abbot will say something. It isn't worth following up on yet.

"You need something from me?" Abbot asks.

"I just wanted to say it helped writing everything up," Samira says. "The case report and the pigtail catheter. You know, like, thinking about things clinically again. So thank you." She had to stop herself from flinching at the sound of sirens when she was out for a run, those first few weeks back; conversely, she can close her eyes and recall the rush she felt when all their batshit maneuvers somehow worked. If both can coexist, she can handle it.

"Good," Abbot says. "I thought it might. Worked for me in the past. Not that I don't appreciate both our names going on the report. Always looks good to wave a publication in front of hospital administration." He's got a smirk on his face, though it's inviting her in on the joke, Samira thinks.

"Of course," Samira says. She couldn't help but look at the way his throat works as he speaks, then makes herself look up at his face, at the way his eyes flash when she meets them.

A pause, and then: "I try to be professional," Abbot says.

Samira blinks, slow. "Princess told me last week Walsh said she was going to throw a scalpel at you unless you got out of her OR," she says.

"Actually, it was unless I got the fuck out of her OR, and I think it was a 22 blade, not just a scalpel, let's be accurate about her threatening me in the workplace." Abbot's hand twitches, and then he touches her wrist. "Look. I'm trying to be professional about you and I'm not doing a very good job. So I need you to tell me now if I'm doing anything that—"

Samira swallows. "I don't mind," she says.

Abbot says, "You probably should."

"Right," Samira says. She thinks back through all her shifts, noting the attention he's paid to her, the subtle way he watches her that's different from how he looks at everyone else. "But—" but she doesn't mind, but they shouldn't be having this conversation here in an empty trauma room that anyone could burst into, but they could get paged at any moment. "But I don't," she finishes, and looks out at the window to see if anyone is watching them. They're safe, but it's only a matter of time. It's almost sweet how he's concerned about a few touches, a drive home. "And we shouldn't have this conversation here. Or anywhere near here, probably."

“There’s a single-stall bathroom a couple halls over,” Abbot says. The corner of his mouth lifts, not quite a smile. “Once I had to drag a couple med students out of there. You might say they were getting to know each other a little too well.”

“And we wouldn’t get caught?” Samira asks. Now she’s the one not being professional. Fuck it. Something shivery is taking root as he watches her, all the way from her chest to the base of her spine, but he’s been looking at her like this for weeks and she just had to—process it. Look back.

“Third student ratted ‘em out after she got puked on all by her lonesome. I assume she thought they all needed to suffer equally.” Abbot shrugs, like he more or less agrees with this point of view. “So? We can finish this chat somewhere else.”

It’s fucking insane that he’s suggesting they sneak out to talk about this in the bathroom. If Samira is reading this right, maybe kiss in the bathroom, maybe more. This is top of the list on things she shouldn’t do, should never do, but she wants to kiss him and she doesn’t want to walk around with need pulsing between her legs for the rest of the shift; if they’ve got 15 minutes she should use it to eat but this seems like a much better use of time. Samira is historically bad at letting herself want things when it comes to other people.

“Give me two minutes,” she says, and dashes to check the board one more time. She grabs her coffee cup like she’s just going for a late-night refill and follows him down the hall, hands around her stethoscope, hoping it looks they’re off to do something official instead of, at bare minimum, discussing their upcoming plans to break half the rules in the employee handbook.

The bathroom is out of the way enough she’s surprised med students managed to find it. “Enterprising little bastards, yeah,” Abbot says, when Samira mentions it, then looks left and right before stepping in right after her. He closes and locks the door with a click, she’s wondering the best way to start the conversation (*how long, really, I’m sure if you are*) and then he’s reaching out, hands cupping her elbows, pulling her close so they can finally, finally kiss, his mouth hot against hers.

“Fuck,” Samira says, and he looks so delighted when they break apart that she has to kiss him before he can say anything else, lips parted so he can lick his way into her mouth, urgent and yearning in a way she can’t remember anyone ever kissing her before, chasing her mouth.

Samira yanks her claw clip out. So maybe they don't need to talk about it first. He watches her shake out her hair, eyes intent. "Think how embarrassing it would be to go back out there with a head lac," she says, and clips it to the hem of her shirt.

Abbot pushes a piece of hair out of her face, tucks it behind her ear. "It would invite a few questions," he says, running his thumb over her jaw. She wants him to kiss her again. She wishes they were in a bedroom so she could pull him on top of her, let him press her into the mattress until she's grounded, back in her own body, and then she could fall apart. But they have three more hours of work and she wants him too much. She doesn't want to wait anymore. They've barely talked about anything but he's standing in front of her with a heady look on his face and his stubble scratched against her jaw as their mouths met. She wraps her hand around the back of his neck, warm skin and bristly hair under her fingers, and kisses him again. It's drugging, the way their mouths fit together, his teeth gentle on her lip. She knew he'd noticed her habit of biting on them and it's paying off tenfold, a gentle tug before he breaks away to mouth at her jaw.

This is, Samira knows, not wise, but making out and then going back to work would be the absolute worst tease. "I have an IUD," she says. "Are you—"

"Yeah," he says, nodding fast, and she trusts him, has trusted him on some deep fundamental level since he stood between her and Walsh and put a scalpel in her hands. Samira yanks him closer, pinning herself between him and the wall, slots his thigh in between her legs and groans.

"It's a pity," Abbot says. He's pushing up her scrub top, fingers fanned across her waist from ribs to hip.

"What's a pity?" Samira goes for broke and yanks down the zip of his cargo pants, gets her hand inside and cups him, squeezes. Abbot's hips jerk forward before he can stop himself.

"Oh," he says. "Mostly what I'd be able to do if we had a little more time." The words ghost over the curve of her jaw, then he bites down on her earlobe, and she's just—trembling, up against the bathroom wall at 3:30 in the morning, weak in the fucking knees.

"You'll have to show me next time," Samira says, breathing out, then angles her head so they can kiss again, fast and messy, mouths sliding against each other. Abbot pushes at the waistband of her scrubs and



underwear, gets them down until they're tangled around her knees and she can spread her legs apart. He ghosts his hand along her lower abdomen, smiling as her muscles contract under his palm, then brings his fingers up to her lips. Samira sucks his fingers into her mouth, gets them wet. She knows what he's trying to do, and it's appreciated, but she wants him inside her now. She shifts her legs wider.

"I know," he says, and presses his hand against her, slides two fingers inside where she's wet and ready for him. She clenches down around him, thinks about next time, laid out languorously in his bed. Abbot doesn't say things he doesn't mean.

"Please," Samira says, grinding against his hand; Abbot stifles a groan against her hair and shoves at his pants, his underwear, rubs his cock along the crease of her cunt. She inhales, sharp, and he does it again, slippery delicious friction she can feel all the way to her spine, and she reaches between them so she can spread herself open and invite him in. Abbot grips the base of his cock and lines himself up, and then he's in and Samira's head falls back against the wall. It's obscene, the way he fits inside her, previewed by every kiss, and she plants her feet firmly on the ground so she can meet his thrusts, one of his hands gripping her hip for leverage and the other planted against the wall. She wishes they were naked, wishes she could feel his chest against hers. It's intense enough feeling his warmth through their two scrub tops, every inhale brushing her breasts against him. Her nipples are drawn tight, her entire body a taut, tense string.

Abbot moves the hand from his hip to press between her legs and Samira gasps, pressure right where she needs it as he drives into her again and again. She drags his head down and kisses him, their mouths sliding against each other; she's so hot, warmth puddling in her stomach all the way down to her toes. She circles her hips up, chasing that heat, toes curling in her sneakers as she tips her head back so Abbot can mouth at her neck, teeth a light brush against her skin. He can't leave any marks. but he can do this, like a promise, a preview for later. Samira's orgasm takes her by surprise, a rolling, cresting peak, pinned to the wall by Abbot's hand and chest and cock. She stifles any noises in the crook of his neck, hair falling around her like a shield.

"Oh, I wanna see you do that again," he says, hips snapping into her as she shudders through it, fingers a heavy, needed pressure on her clit. "Next time I'm not letting you hide."

Samira bites him, just under the collar of his shirt, and he shuts up

with a gasp, mouth dragging over her forehead until she tilts her head to kiss him again, panting into his mouth. She can feel it when he comes a couple minutes later, hot inside her, his fingers scrabbling for purchase against the wall.

If this is what 15 minutes in a bathroom gets them—they're going to ruin each other when they make it to a bed. She breathes in through her nose and out through her mouth and looks at him, cataloguing his blown pupils and the pink flush overlying the freckles on his face.

Abbot kisses her again, softer, a distraction as he pulls out. She feels him slip two fingers into her cunt, and then he's cursing under his breath when he sees his come on his fingers, pearlescent white on the tops of her inner thighs.

If there's something appropriate to say here, well, she has absolutely no fucking clue. And she's picturing his head between her thighs, her hand in his curls, eating her out after he's fucked her open—god, Samira's never going to be able to walk down this hallway without blushing again, and from the look he's giving her, he knows it.

She runs her hand through her hair, working out the snarls, then twists it back up into a bun. Abbot watches each movement, though he looks politely away when Samira goes over to the sink to try and clean up the mess between her legs. She gets most of it, but—she's going to be feeling this all the way to signout, the stickiness and the stretch in her inner thighs.

Next time he'll come in her and then slide down her body, taste himself inside her. Samira swallows hard against the want rising in her throat, splashing some cold water on her face. She can't do anything about the stubble burn but hopefully it won't get any worse.

"Hey," Abbot says, and suddenly he's behind her, but hands encircling her hips. He meets her eyes in the mirror, tugs her scrub pants up and ties the drawstring in a neat bow, Samira wants to grind back against him and watch the way his eyes spark. She's also certain if she does one, or both, of their pagers will go off. They were lucky to get enough time for this.

So she says, "Hey," back instead, lets herself lean against him as he shifts his hand flat to her stomach, steady and warm.

"I'm off tomorrow," Abbot says. She knows he has her schedule—he must know she is too.

“One of my roommates, her sister is visiting,” Samira says. “I doubt they would mind if I cleared out. I could just—grab a few things?”

It doesn't need to be a question but she wants him to say it, suddenly, invite her home with him, tell her there's space for her, let her sleep off a week of nights next to him in his bed. They can finish their conversation about professionalism. Or maybe they won't.

“We'll swing by yours,” Abbot says and presses an open-mouthed kiss to the back of her neck, right on the knob of her spine, before he gives her a few minutes to maintain plausible deniability and goes.

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She meets him after the shift ends in some far corner of the parking lot. He's grouching about the location, car keys in his hands, then punches her address into his phone. They can't kiss in the hospital parking lot but he brushes her hip when he opens the car door for her like a promise.

Given that Rachel is a law student and and Jihyun is an over-stressed CMU engineering PhD, neither of them are awake when she steps quietly through the door, Abbot idling outside on the corner waiting for her. Rachel's sister is asleep and snoring on the couch, easily identifiable—the two of them look so alike they could be twins, same dark curly hair and strong eyebrows. Samira throws clean underwear into her backpack, leggings and a t-shirt, grabs her toothbrush and contacts and phone charger, then traipses back downstairs. She can text her roommates where she is later. They're used to the inconsistencies of her schedule, anyway. They won't notice anything has changed.

There's music playing in the car when she slides into the front seat—Biggie, Samira thinks, and holds back a laugh—and Abbot takes the car out of park, gets back on the road.

Samira has all of Big Poppa and half of Party and Bullshit to wonder if she's making a mistake, rushing into this, and then, as they pull into the driveway, decides she doesn't care. His neighborhood is quiet as he pulls up to a newer-looking apartment building, parks in the basement and leads her upstairs.

She's dangling on the precipice of something here: a quick hookup in the bathroom late at night might be one thing but going home with

Abbot is another, staying overnight even more. She doesn't doubt his ability to be even-keeled at work tomorrow, as much as he ever is, and she knows she can compartmentalize with the best of them, but—still.

She thinks back to her first shift after PittFest. How he took her at her word, how he knew she could handle it. He knows her, because he's been there too, and he wants her back.

Samira steps over the threshold and follows him inside.

## End Notes

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